

## What is a Noxious Weed?

Weeds are plants that interfere with management objectives for a given area of land at a given point in time. Noxious weeds are invasive non-native plants that are aggressive, competitive, highly destructive or difficult to control. "Noxious weed" is also a legal term: the Washington State Noxious Weed List is a regulatory list identifying plants that, by law, must be controlled.

## The Problem of Noxious Weeds:

Noxious weeds are fierce competitors – able to invade and dominate sites very quickly. Many of these weeds are poisonous or can cause other types of physical damage to wildlife, livestock, and humans. Because most of these are non-native, they are able to outcompete the local native plants. Generally, wherever the noxious weed species originates from, wherever **it** is a native plant, there are predators and competitors that evolved to keep that plant population in check. Without the normal predators and competitors, these plants can flourish. The spread of noxious weeds degrade the ecological balance of our lands – leading to increased erosion, damage to streams and fisheries, losses in wildlife, increased fire danger, and losses of culturally significant plants such as roots and medicines. These plants can alter the ability of native plants to recover from disturbance, and permanently change vegetative communities and wildlife habitat. For example, Spotted Knapweed in Western Montana has eliminated 90 percent of elk forage in some sites!

## Myths about Noxious Weeds:

There is a lot of talk about "ob-noxious" weeds, leading to some bad information.

### **Myth #1: Fire kills weeds**

Fire is a tool that we can use in the control of weeds; however, it must be timed correctly and used in combination with other measures such as re-seeding, chemical use, and livestock management. Some weeds actually **LIKE** fire – because they can outcompete the native plants after fire goes through. Examples of this are cheatgrass and knapweed.

### **Myth #2: Grazing will kill them out**

Many of these plants are poisonous to animals and livestock. Tansy ragwort, knapweed, houndstongue and others can cause problems from skin disorders to liver damage and other fatal diseases. Some edible plant seeds can actually pass through the animal (yup – all the way through) and get "planted" wherever the pie falls. Improper grazing management can lead to an explosion of weeds, animals graze on preferred native plants and weaken their ability to compete against noxious weeds, while hooves disturb the soil giving weeds the opportunity

to spread into disturbed sites.

**Myth #3: Ok, we sprayed 'em this year so now they are gone!**

Weeds are tough, we need to treat them year after year to get rid of them. Weed control programs take 10 years or longer to complete. One reason is that weed-seeds may stay dormant in the soil for many years (Scotch broom seeds can sit there for 60 years!). Fact is, we need to use an integrated approach (many different tools) and keep it up for several years to control these weeds and restore our lands.

**Myth #4: It doesn't really matter what I do, I'm just one person**

If you don't help, who will? We all need to work to stop the spread of noxious weeds at work and at home. By controlling noxious weeds on your property, you eliminate seed sources and reduce the weed population. By practicing common sense and checking your vehicle carriage when coming in or out of an area – you are eliminating one of the weeds' main vectors (avenue of spread). At work, you have a responsibility to this National Monument to protect the resource – noxious weed control is everyone's responsibility.